論集第19号（1998年）

The Hero as (Anti)christ in *Sir Gowther*: The Influence of the Apocryphal Gospels Reconsidered*

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中英語ロマンス『ゴウサー卿』における（反）キリストのイメージ－経外典福音書の影響再考

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中英語尾韻ロマンス『ゴウサー卿』は中世ヨーロッパにおいて人気を博した「悪魔ロバート」伝説の一つであり、後に改心する悪魔の申し子の生涯を描く。かつてM. B. オーグルという研究者はこのロマンスの冒頭に経外典福音書の影響が見られることを指摘した。この説は学界に受け入れられているとはいいがたいが、テクストの詳細な検討ならびに中世ヨーロッパにおいて聖家族とりわけ聖母子崇敬を題材とした伝説・視覚芸術が大いにもてはやされたという事実を踏まえると、経外典のこの作品への影響は、むしろオーグルが説く以上に顕著なのではないかと考えられる。その影響は、例えば、経外典でマリアの両親とされるヨアキムとアンナにまつわるエピソード、マリアへの受胎告知、幼児イエスに授乳する聖母などの「パロディー」という形で現れている。ゴウサーは経外典に描かれる少年期のイエスを奇妙に髣髴させる「反キリスト」として生まれ、長じては結局、その憎むべきイエスに倣い、聖人として生涯を終えるのである。

1.

The eponymous heroine of *Emaré*, a Middle English tail-rhyme romance, nurses her little son whilst they are drifting in a rudderless boat after they have been banished by her wicked mother-in-law :

> And when the chyld gan to wepe
> Wyth sory herte she songe hyt aslepe,
> And putte the pappe yn hys mowth. (661-63) (1)

Then 'she made her prayer/ To Jesu and hys modur dere' (670-71). A week or so later their boat is washed up on the beach near Rome safely by the grace of God. I have argued elsewhere that the figures of the Virgin and Child Christ are reflected in the depiction of Emaré and her son, given the fact that the Holy Mother suckling Jesus was a popular motif in late medieval literature and visual arts, and so the heroine's prayer to the two is ap-

propriate. [2] The analogous story of Constance is found in Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Man of Law's Tale' and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, though lactation is lacking in the former and no mention is made of Mary in the latter. [3]

Sir Gowther is another Middle English tail-rhyme romance. The hero Gowther is born to the Duke and Duchess of Austria, who have been childless for ten years or more. But the baby's real father is the Devil, possibly an incubus, who had intercourse with the Duchess by a trick after she had made a rash prayer to God and Mary that they '[s]chuld gyffe hur grace to have a chyld, / On what maner scho ne roghth' (62-63). [4] The diabolic suckling is markedly different from Emaré's son, and still more so from the Child Christ :

His modur fell a fowle unhappe ;
Apon a day bad hym tho pappe,
He snaffulld to hit soo,
He rofe tho hed fro tho brest ;
Scho fell backeward and cald a prest,
To chambur fled hym froo. (124-29)

This could have struck the medieval audience as an abhorrent counter image of the familiar nursing of Jesus. Surprisingly, however, the depiction of the Antichrist-like hero's birth and growth may have been influenced by that of the Holy Family found in some of the Apocryphal Gospels, which are acknowledgedly the sources of various medieval literary works.

2.

Sir Gowther was composed in the Northeast Midlands around 1400. It is in sixty-three twelve-line stanzas rhyming *aabccbddbeeb*. [5] The poem is extant in two manuscripts: National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.3.1 (henceforth A), and B. L., MS Royal 17. B. 43 (B), both dating from about the last quarter of the fifteenth century. I shall return, though briefly, to the manuscript contexts of, and the discrepancies between, the two texts later. Like *Emaré, Sir Gowther* claims to be a Breton lay. However, if the couplet romances like *Sir Orfeo* or *Sir Degare* are more or less genuine lays, our tale is, along with most of the other tail-rhyme Breton lays, more like a hagiography. [6]

Critics agree that *Sir Gowther*, which contains the two traditional motifs of 'Wish-Child' (albeit divergent from the common form) and 'male Cinderella', is a version of the 'Robert the Devil' legend popular in many parts of medieval Europe. It was in France that this legend flourished most. The earliest versions of 'Robert' are one in Latin prose by Etienne de Bourbon from the mid thirteenth century, and a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century piece in French verse called the *Roman d'aventures*. In these the contrite and pardoned protag-

onist decides to follow a hermit's life instead of marrying the Emperor's daughter at the end of the story. Another French poem, *Dit de Robert le Diable*, from the fourteenth century is based on the *Roman*, but the hero weds the princess and becomes a virtuous ruler. The *Dit*, in turn, is the source of *La Vie du terrible Robert le Diable* in prose, which was rendered into English by an unknown translator, and printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1502 and reprinted in 1518. Soon after the English prose version appeared, it was reworked in a metrical form and published by de Worde or Pynson. Thomas Lodge's lengthy pseudo-historical account, entitled *The Famous, true and historicall life of Robert second Duke of Normandy, surnamed for his monstrous birth and behauiour, Robin the Diuell*, was published in 1591. This is based on a thirteenth-century French version of the legend among the *Croniques de Normandie*, and hence is independent of the two English versions in prose and verse. [7] The Robert legend seems to have been less popular in England than in France. Nothing certain is known about the relation between *Sir Gowther* and the legend. Karl Breul argues that the romance is based on a lost *lai breton* derived from the 'geistliche Umarbeitung' of the original folk tales, from which, he assumes, the legend was also drawn. [8] Criticising Breul, Cornelius Novelli claims that *Sir Gowther* is a fairly late reshaping of the Robert legend, whilst Andrea Hopkins thinks that it stemmed from something similar to one of the earliest French versions, i.e., the *Roman*. [9] However this may be, *Sir Gowther* is far closer to the Robert legend than to any other possible source and analogue to be mentioned in the following. There are, however, some minor but intriguing differences between our romance and the legend.

Florence Leftwich Ravenel regards the first half of *Sir Gowther* as a mixture of the Robert legend and *Tydorel*, a Breton lay. [10] The lay tells the story of the heirless King and Queen of Brittany who are blessed with a son at last. But his real father is in fact a supernatural being, about which the King does not know. Tydorel is marked by a strange characteristic—he never sleeps. Unlike young Gowther, however, he is beloved by his friends. On learning of the secret of his birth from his mother, who is reluctant to reveal the truth, the hero rides away to the shore of a lake from which his supernatural father came, and plunges beneath the waters, never to return. Hopkins questions Ravenel's argument by pointing out that some features in *Tydorel* which she considers points of contact between the lay and *Sir Gowther* are in fact found in different versions of the Robert legend. [11]

In *Sir Gowther*, reference is made twice to Merlin, a popular figure in the Arthurian legend : '... he [the fende] begat Merlyng and mo/ And wrought ladies so mikil wo/ That ferly it is to here' (10-12 ; missing in A, supplied from B), and 'This chyld [Gowther] within hur was non odur/ Bot eyvon Marlyon halfe brodur, / For won fynd gatte hom bothe' (94-96). Novelli writes, 'it is certain that the author of SG was familiar with, and expected audiences to be familiar with, one or more of the popular legends about Merlin.' Hopkins argues that the poet may have meant the audience to expect the advent of the Antichrist by alluding to Gowther's likeness to Merlin. [12] In both *Sir Gowther* and the Merlin legend, the fiend's attempts to create the Antichrist are, of course, abortive.

E. M. Bradstock discusses some similarities and differences between the Robert legend/*Sir Gowther* and the tale of St. Alexius, of which a Middle English version is roughly coeval with *Sir Gowther* and shares the same metrical form, though she does not deal with their influence on each other. Alexius is born to a married couple who have prayed to God requesting a child, but there is no diabolic intervention in his birth. [13] Hopkins finds an analogy between our romance and Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius*, whose hero, himself the offspring of an incestuous union, marries his own mother unwittingly. Neither Gowther nor Gregorius is responsible for their sins, but they become penitents in the latter half of the stories. However, it is not Hopkins's aim to seek the source of the romance in Hartmann's hagiography. [14]

M. B. Ogle argues that both *Sir Gowther* and *Tydorel* borrowed the theme of the barren wife lamenting and wishing for a child in the orchard from the story of Joachim and Anna in the Apocryphal New Testament. [15] Ogle's argument, however, has not been favourably received by critics. Though she admits that there are some parallels between *Gowther/Tydorel* and the Anna legend, Laura A. Hibbard is sceptical about the direct borrowing Ogle suggests. Novelli, who favours the argument for a possible indirect borrowing, lists three principal differences between *Sir Gowther* and the Apocryphal story : '1) the supernatural visitor in SG comes in the shape of the woman's husband ; 2) the angel who visits Anna is in no sense the begetter of the child ; and 3) Anna's child is to be holy, whilst the Duchess's child, at least initially, is to be a type of the extreme sinner.' [16] Nevertheless, despite these obvious differences, Ogle's ideas seem to deserve reconsideration, given the immense popularity of legends centring on the lives of Mary, and the Holy Family in general in late medieval times. I am inclined to think that the Apocryphal stories may have influenced the early part of *Sir Gowther* not only directly, but also more extensively than Ogle argues. (But, of course, I must hasten to add that the possible sources and analogues mentioned so far are not necessarily mutually exclusive.) Before examining our romance in detail, we may well survey briefly the tradition of the cult of the Holy Family in medieval England.

Although the Marian cult had been brought to England in the Anglo-Saxon period, it was during the late Middle Ages that it flourished most vigorously. England was given the popular epithet of 'the dower of the Virgin', and the importance of the holy shrine at Little Walsingham in Norfolk, for example, as an international centre of pilgrimage was rivalled only by Santiago de Compostela in Spain and by Rome. [17] Furthermore, devotion to the Virgin became a salient feature in 'official' as well as 'popular' religion of the period, and the Church itself was under the influence of 'the popular traditions and practical realities of the day.' [18] The movement was closely connected with the reviving popularity of the Apocryphal Gospels, which had been suppressed for centuries by the Church. Probably the most important Apocryphal Gospel in relation to medieval literature is the *Historia de Nativitate Mariae et de Infantia Salvatoris*, commonly known as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which is a conflation of the *Protevangelium Jacobi* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. *Pseudo-Matthew* seems to have been written around 800 in an attempt to promote the veneration of Mary. [19] The Gospel relates, among other things, the stories of Joachim and Anna, the birth of Mary, her tender age,

her marriage to Joseph, the Annunciation, the Nativity, and Jesus' infancy. Many of these episodes are not found in the Canonical Gospels. *Pseudo-Matthew* offered these as inspiration not only to a number of medieval literary works but also to stained glass windows and wall paintings in parish churches in England and Europe. As Christ's mother came to receive increasingly greater veneration, so did his grandmother. The conception of Mary was believed to have taken place when Joachim and Anna, who had been childless for many years, met at the Golden Gate in Jerusalem as the angel had advised them. The feast of Mary's conception, of Eastern origin, was brought to England via Italy, and found enthusiastic response there. It was from England that the feast spread throughout Europe. Anna, then, was invoked for conceiving children, and became the patron saint of married couples and of motherhood. [20] The coloured windows in All Souls College, Oxford (c. 1441), for example, depict the Holy Family including Anna teaching Mary how to read, and the Virgin and Child. [21]

3.

Dialectologists have localised the Advocates manuscript in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and the Royal manuscript in Derbyshire. [22] The former, described by Gisela Guddat-Figge as a collection of '[v]ery unusual mixture of texts', contains two other romances, *Sir Ysumbras* and *Sir Amadace*, whilst the latter consists of four manuscripts bound together, 'all containing texts with a certain moral-didactic tinge.' [23] Henry Vandelinde insists that the manuscript contexts of the two afford few if any clues to the understanding of the two texts of *Sir Gowther*. It may be nevertheless noteworthy that the Advocates MS contains John Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady*, though only Books 4,5 and 6 are covered and Book 6 ends imperfectly. [24] Critics agree that B was intended for a more refined audience than that of A, as, for example, the depiction of Gowther's atrocious terrorism is toned down in B. However, the superiority, and the closeness to the original, of the two texts have been variously argued. I presume the discrepancies between A and B make little difference for the purpose of the present essay, and I follow Maldwyn Mills's edition based on A and occasionally supplied from B. But some intriguing discrepancies will be noted.

The Duke of Austria weds 'a ladé, non hur lyke, / For comly undur kell ; / To th[e lyly was likened that lady clere].' (32-34 ; bracketed is the line missing in A and supplied from B.) The lily flower suggests chastity and is often associated with the Madonna, as the Prioress in *The Canterbury Tales* narrates, 'Wherfore in laude, as I best kan or may, / Of thee [Jesus] and of the white lylye flour/ Which that the bar, and is a mayde alway...' ('Prologue of the Prioress's Tale', *CT* VII, 460-62). In Middle English romances, the flower is also an epithet commonly applied to noble and saintly ladies including Emaré, and Florence in *Le Bone Florence of Rome*. Gowther's mother is, if noble, not particularly virtuous ; she is, rather, a woman of moral weakness, as we shall see later. However, the mention of the flower may prove less inappropriate after the examination of the context that follows.

The theme of the Wish-Child is not infrequent in Middle English romances. In *Octavian*, a couple have

an abbey built in honour of the Virgin, whom they ask to intercede with Christ for a child. She satisfies their wish. The Duke and Duchess in *Sir Gowther* are childless for ten years or more. The husband then suggests to his wife that they should get divorced. In despair, she says a rash prayer to God and the Virgin :

Tho ladé sykud and made yll chere,
That all feylyd hur whyte lere,
For schu conseyvyd noght,
Scho preyd to God and Maré mylde
Schuld gyffe hur grace to have a chyld,
On what maner scho ne roghth. (58-63)

One day, in their orchard, she meets a man in the likeness of her husband, who asks her to lie with him. Having gratified his lust 'undur a tre' (68 ; 'Undernethe a chestayne tree' in B), the man reveals himself as a 'felturd fende' (71), and prophesies that she will give birth to a man child who is to be very wild in youth. [25] The wife in the Robert legend is considerably different from the Duchess in *Sir Gowther*. In the *Roman*, for example, she accuses God of not bestowing a baby on her, and prays to the Devil instead :

'Diable,' fait el, 'je te proi
Que tu entenges ja vers moi :
Se tu me dones un enfant,
Che te proi dès ore en avant.' (45-48) [26]

In the first two English versions of the Robert legend in prose and verse, she even promises to give the baby to the Devil. As a result of his wife's prayer, the Duke finally begets a child. Some critics argue that the Duchess's sin is made more forgivable in *Sir Gowther*, because her prayer is, if reckless, considerably less blasphemous than the wife's in the other versions, and she seems to think the man she is lying with is her own husband. [27] At the same time, however, this modification inevitably makes Gowther the Devil's real son and a more explicitly Antichrist-like figure than Robert.

As we have seen, Ogle finds the source of the orchard scene, and of its counterpart in *Tydorel*, in the Apocryphal Gospels on the ground that the meeting between the wife and the supernatural being under a tree in a garden or an orchard is unique to *Sir Gowther* among the various versions of the Robert legend. [28] In *Pseudo-Matthew*, for example, the barren Anna goes into the garden of her house, and laments Joachim's disappearance and her infertility near a laurel tree, and vows a child, if she is blessed with one, to the service of God. The angel's visitation follows immediately. [29] Remember that Novelli criticises Ogle by pointing out the unlike-

ness of the supernatural visitors in the Apocryphal Gospel and *Sir Gowther* (his first and second points). But I would argue that the romancer's aim was achieved when he created an Apocryphal Gospel-like framework reminiscent, if only vaguely, of the Holy Family.

It is natural that the cult of the Virgin's mother, which we have surveyed above, should have made the Immaculate Conception a popular motif in late medieval literature. The Joachim and Anna legend and the birth of Mary are treated in, among others, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea, Cursor Mundi, The Life of Saint Anne*, the N-Town Cycle, and Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*. It is interesting to note that a version of *The Life of Saint Anne* contained in the University of Minnesota MS Z. 822, N. 81 is in tail-rhyme stanzas, and that the manuscript, dating from the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century, seems to have been produced in the North or the North(east) Midlands. [30] Though the manuscript is earlier than those of *Sir Gowther*, this provenance seems to enhance the possibility that materials originating from the Apocryphal Gospels were fairly readily available in the late medieval Northeast Midlands. In the tail-rhyme *Life*, the garden scene is related as follows :

Apon a day til hyr yherde sho yhede,
　Company had sho non.
Under a tre þat laureall hatt
In an herber on knes sho satt
　To god makand hyr mone.　(110-114)

The Joachim and Anna legend also found its way into visual arts. Early fourteenth-century mural paintings, discovered in Croughton, Northamptonshire, depict the story of the couple and the miraculous conception of Mary. In Fairford, Gloucestershire, stained glass showing Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate was glazed at a parish church in the early sixteenth century. [31]

After she has fled from her encounter with the fiend, the Duchess lies to her husband when she says,

'Tonyght we mon geyt a chyld,
　That schall owre londus weld.
An angell com fro hevon bryght
And told me so this same nyght :
　I hope was Godus sond.
Then wyll that stynt all owr stryfe —' (80-85)

Not knowing the misfortune which befell his wife, the Duke says, "'Dame, we schall fonde"' (87). This lie is

found neither in the other versions of the Robert legend nor in *Tydorel.* Mills argues that the perversion has a certain aptness, as in other homiletic romances angels figure to herald God's will, and however wicked the hero may be at the early stages, he finally conforms to God's will. [32] Other critics find here an echo, or more precisely a travesty, of the Annunciation which is found in both Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels, implying that the image of the Antichrist is reflected in the hero Gowther. [33] Whilst I agree with this argument, I am inclined to point out that in the Apocryphal Gospels the angel also visits Joachim and Anna separately, telling each of them that the latter will bear the Saviour's mother. But, of course, the analogy of the conception of Jesus, rather than of Mary, must have come more easily into the minds of the audience, given the shocking polarity between Christ and Gowther which is to become evident soon after. Possibly the two instances of conception may be doubly reflected here, and if so, the poet's attention may have been shifted at this stage from Anna and Mary to Mary and Jesus. The visitation of an angel to Anna and Joachim, and the Annunciation are both recounted in *Legenda Aurea, Cursor Mundi*, the tail-rhyme *Life of Saint Anne*, and the N-Town Cycle. Bokenham tells only the story of Anna. Needless to say, the theme of the Annunciation is referred to in countless other texts, and depicted in various genres of visual arts.

The infant Gowther displays signs of diabolic nature soon after his birth :

> And aftur melche wemen he [the Duke] sende,
> Tho best in that cuntre,
> That was full gud knyghttys wyffys :
> He [Gowther] sowkyd hom so thei lost ther lyvys,
> Sone had he sleyn three.
> The duke gard prycke aftur sex ;
> Tho chyld was yong and fast he wex —
> Hende, harkons yee.
> Be twelfe monethys was gon
> Nyne norsus had he slon
> Of ladys feyr and fre. (107-17)

Knights of the country gather together and tell the Duke that it is no joke to lose their wives like this, adding that they will offer no more wet nurses to the baby. The mother, who now has to suckle her son at her own breast, encounters 'a fowle unhappe', as we have seen earlier in the present essay ; she has her nipple torn off. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury write that early dentition was believed to indicate demonic paternity in the Middle Ages. [34] Kari Sajavaara reports that the 'tearing of a nipple' episode shared by *Sir Gowther* and the two English versions of the Robert legend is not found in the French versions. In the *Roman*, for example, the

infant is a little less maleficent :

> Et quant li malfés alaitoit,
> Sa noriche tous tans mordoit,
> Tous tans hule, tous tans resquinge,
> Ja n'ert a aisse s'il ne winge. (105-08)

The English prose version printed by Wynkyn de Worde goes, '... in shorte space he had longe teeth wherwith he bote the norshes pappes in such wyse, that there was no woman durst gyue hym souke, for he bote off the hedes of theyr brestes' (p.173), whilst in the metrical version, 'For hys teeth grewe so perylousslye, / That the norysshe nypples he bote a waye' (154-55). Thomas Lodge, whose pseudo-historical account Sajavaara says nothing of, also writes, 'instead of drawing nutriment from his Nurse, hee bit off her nipples' (p. 11). [35] Whilst pointing out that the translator of the English prose text may have seen a copy of *Sir Gowther*, Sajavaara, along with other critics, has failed to note that only in *Sir Gowther* does the mother herself have her breast injured. Although I have not examined all the European versions of the legend, this episode seems to be lacking in the other English versions and the French at least. Nor does it appear in *Tydorel.*

As I have argued earlier, the suckling mother victimised may have been meant as a horrifying travesty of the Madonna nursing Jesus at her breast. In the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, Mary gives birth to Jesus in a cave :

> And immediately the cloud disappeared from the cave and a great light appeared, so that our eyes could not bear it. A short time afterwards that light withdrew until the baby appeared, and it came and took the breast of its mother Mary. (19 : 2) [36]

Though lacking in the Canonical Gospels, the Virgin feeding Jesus was a popular motif in late medieval literature, and even more so in visual arts. Nicholas Love from Yorkshire, who translated pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes Vitae Christi* into English under the title *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* in the early fifteenth century, writes :

> sodeynly was vpon hey at his modere feet, & anone she deuoutly enclinande with souereyn ioy toke him in hire armes, & swetly clippyng & kissyng, leide him in hir barme, & with a fulle pap, as she was taght of þe holi

> gost, weshe him alle aboute with hir swete milke, & so wrapped him in þe kerchif of her hede, & leide him in þe crach.... (Die Lune , Capitulum vj^{m}) [37]

Winchester College Chapel houses a stained glass window glazed in 1393, which depicts the sweet-faced Virgin nursing Jesus wrapped in blue cloth (her kerchief?) at her ample breast.

Sir Gowther, as a young man, terrorising his people is certainly one of the most brutal characters in Middle English romances :

> He went to honte apon a day ;
> He see a nonry be tho way
> And thedur con he ryde.
> The pryorys and hur covent
> With presescion ageyn hym went
> Full hastely that tyde.
> Thei wer full ferd of his body,
> For he and is men bothe leyn hom by :
> Tho sothe why schuld Y hyde?
> And sythyn he spard hom in hor kyrke
> And brend hom up—thus con he werke ;
> Then went his name full wyde.
>
> All that ever on Cryst con lefe,
> Yong and old, he con hom greve
> In all that he myght doo.
> Meydyns' maryage wolde he spyll
> And take wyffus ageyn hor wyll,
> And sley hor husbondus too.
> And make frerus to leype at kraggus
> And persons forto heng on knaggus,
> And odur prestys sloo.
> To bren armettys was is dyssyre :
> A powre wedow to seyt on fyre,
> And werke hom mykyll woo. (178-201) [38]

Robert's behaviour as a young man is likewise dreadful, whether in the French or in the English. However, whilst Robert terrorises both the clergy and the laity, Gowther attacks chiefly the clergy, thereby evoking more explicitly the image of the Antichrist. (In marked contrast to the two, Tydorel is a virtuous young man loved by his friends.) There are also some differences between the *Roman* and the first two English versions of the Robert legend. To the latter are added two intriguing episodes absent from the *Roman* or *Sir Gowther*. In the English *Robert* in prose, for example, the boy 'gate a murderer or bodkin, and thrust his [scole] mayster in the bely that his guttes fell at his fete, and so fell downe deed to the erth' (p.174). The schoolmaster was attempting to chastise Robert so that he might mend his behaviour. The killing of the teacher also occurs in Lodge's prose version. After being knighted, Robert's atrocity is aggravated despite his parents' faint hope that he may behave himself as a knight. Hearing of the complaints people have made to his father about his cruelty, he puts out the eyes of his father's servants who have been dispatched to capture him. The *Roman* mentions Robert as a problem pupil, and the blinding, but they are not expanded into independent episodes.

The killing of one's own teacher and the blinding of one's accusers are exactly what Jesus as a child does, though in less offensive fashion, in the Apocryphal Gospels. In *Pseudo-Matthew*, he is described, at least by modern, and probably also late medieval, standards, as an *enfant terrible* who, for example, curses his playmates to death simply because they have hindered him in his play. Jesus is also a rather impudent pupil. Therefore 'the master, being angry, smote Jesus ; and soon after he smote him he died' (Chapter 38). In *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, those who have accused Jesus of having cursed a boy to death become blind instantly. Though he usually resuscitates the people he has cursed and opens the eyes of those blinded, often on the intercession of Mary, and the writers of these Gospels may simply have wished to stress Jesus' innate, rather than acquired, supernaturalness as embodied in his precociousness, the representations of God's Son in them are shocking and even offensive. It is possible, I assume, that the childhood of the Apocryphal Jesus is reflected in the account of Robert's evildoing in the English versions. [39] In contrast Gowther's terrorisation of his people, which is, as we have seen, extremely anti-clerical, seems to have little in common with the Apocryphal Gospels, and I hesitate to insist positively that the romancer had in mind the Apocryphal representations of the Child Christ at this stage of the story. However, Jesus and Gowther, set against Robert, share at least one important trait—they both carry out their fathers' will. Gowther is the Devil's son, and so, '[Erly and] late, lowde and styll, /He wold wyrke is fadur wyll' (172-73). Novelli thinks that this is an allusion to Jesus' words, 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' (Luke 2 : 49). [40] This famous scene is also found in, among others, *The Arabic Gospel of Infancy*, another Apocryphal text (Chapter 53).

By and large medieval authors seem to have been reluctant to recount the childhood of Jesus as found in the Apocryphal Gospels. Of the medieval works influenced by these Gospels which I have referred to earlier in the present paper, only *Cursor Mundi* and the tail-rhyme *Life of Saint Anne* relate the episodes from the Infancy Gospels. The former includes the cursed teacher's death, whilst the latter covers both the teacher's death

and the blinding of the accusers. The maker of the N-Town Cycle, believed to have borrowed some stories from the *Life*, did not attempt to dramatise the episodes of the mischievous Jesus.

In his in-depth study of medieval ideas of the Antichrist, Richard Kenneth Emmerson reports that Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet were believed to form an evil trinity in opposition to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The medieval tradition also includes two seemingly contradictory images of the Antichrist : the one who is to appear immediately before the Second Advent of Jesus, and the other already present in the evil lives of human beings — false Christians, heretics, Jews, Saracens among others — one of whom the young Gowther could have been understood as. Furthermore, the Antichrist was also described sometimes as a hypocritical pseudo-Christ, and sometimes as a ruthless tyrant who persecutes Christians (or perhaps as both). Gowther, it seems, definitely falls under the second group. These various aspects of the Antichrist were extensively studied and discussed by medieval clerics including Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the writer of *Cursor Mundi*.[41] I presume it is beyond doubt that the hero of our romance was imaged as Antichrist, or at least Antichrist-like figure. However, he is crucially different from other Antichrists ; he is destined to wash his hands of evildoing. Like Robert, Sir Gowther, on learning of the secret of his birth, repents his wrongdoing, performs penance, at the command of the Pope, by serving the German Emperor as Hob the Fool—he is not allowed to speak, or eat anything but what he snatches from dogs—, and fights incognito with the Saracens to bring succour to his lord. Finally pardoned, the hero weds the Emperor's daughter and becomes a noble and virtuous ruler. He dies as a saint or a saintly man. He posthumously works a number of miracles. The penultimate stanza of the A text goes :

Whoso sechys hym with hart fre,
Of hor bale bote mey bee :
  For so God hase hym hyght.
Thes wordus of hym thar no mon wast,
For he is inspyryd with tho Holy Gost,
  That was tho cursod knyght.
For he garus tho blynd to see
And tho dompe to speyke, pardé,
  And makus tho crokyd ryght ;
And gyffus to tho mad hor wytte
And mony odur meracullus yette,
  Thoro tho grace of God allmyght. (727-38)

Bradstock comments that these lines are reminiscent of Luke 7 : 22 and that the miracles stress the hero's role

as a healer and Christ-figure. [42] Whilst the descriptions of his miracles are a little more succinct in B, it adds that the hero 'hatt Seynt Gotlake' [St. Guthlac] (681), and is concluded with the line 'Explicit Vita Sancti.' [43]

4.

We have seen that some Apocryphal, sometimes also Canonical, episodes of the Holy Family may be reflected in *Sir Gowther*. I am inclined to imagine that the poet intentionally created the figures reminiscent of Joachim, Anna, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. He made an alteration to the original Robert legend, thereby rendering the sin of Gowther's mother more forgivable than that of Robert's, and at the same time the hero literally diabolic, though, like Robert, he is not accountable for his own birth. Whilst bearing a distorted likeness to Jesus, Gowther is given, at least initially, the role of the Antichrist. It is more difficult to imagine the response of the audience and readers. They probably noticed the parody of the Annunciation, and perhaps also of the Virgin suckling Jesus. Medieval English people were under the predominant influence of the cult of the Holy Family, and particularly the Marian devotion which was often represented literarily and iconographically. (The Madonna is referred to five times in the romance, whilst the reference is less frequent in the much longer French and English versions of the Robert legend.) [44] Whatever the case, the audience must have fully realised that the hero was a man of exceptional talent, and expected unusual events ahead of him. Cultural anthropologists have pointed out that the culture hero traditionally tends to have two fathers—a supernatural real father, and an earthly foster father. [45] He is usually expected to execute his supernatural father's will. Jesus does, and so does Gowther.

The poet may have wished to emphasise that people like Gowther, the incarnation of evil, could, after due penance, become a 'Christ-figure', which is, however, made possible only by the grace of the Saviour and the Virgin. The child Gowther, born the Antichrist, paradoxically reminiscent of the Child Christ, is destined to follow and imitate the one he has hated most.

NOTES

* An abridged version of this paper was presented at the Fourth International Medieval Congress, Leeds, July 1997. I would like to thank Professor John Burrow of the University of Bristol for his valuable comments on a draft of this paper.

(1) The text is taken from Maldwyn Mills, ed., ***Six Middle English Romances*** (Dent : London, 1973).

(2) "'So well y schall the saue" —A Study of the ME Tail-Rhyme "Breton Lays"," *Osaka Gaidai Eibei Kenkyu* 20 (1995) : 139-66. [Tajiri (1995b)] At pp.159-60.

(3) I owe my discussion of *Emaré* partly to Hiroe Futamura, 'Chaucer no Boshi-zo (Chaucer's Portrayal of Mother and Child),' [in Japanese] *Chaucer to Kirisuto-kyo* (Chaucer and Christianity), ed. Isamu Saito, *et al.* (Tokyo : Gakushobo, 1984) 51-72. She finds a similar reflection of the Madonna and Child in 'The Man of Law's Tale'.

(4) The text is taken from Mills (1973) based on the A text (see the discussion of the two manuscripts in what follows).

(5) Mortimer J. Donovan, 'Breton Lays,' *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, Fascicule 1, ed. J. B. Severs (New Haven : The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967) 133 -43. At pp.141-42, where the

résumé of the romance is also given.

(6) See my 'Middle English Breton Lays" —Two Traditions,' ***SENTENTIAE : English and Medieval Studies Presented to Yoshitaka Mizutori in Honour of his Sixtieth Birthday***, ed. Kiyoaki Kikuchi, *et al.* (Kyoto : Hokuto P, 1995) 267-77. [Tajiri (1995a)]

(7) I owe the information about the development of the Robert tradition in France and England to Cornelius Novelli, ed., 'Sir Gowther (An Edition),' Diss., U of Notre Dame, 1963 (at pp.33-41) and Kari Sajavaara, 'The Sixteenth-Century Versions of *Robert the Devil,' NM* 80 (1979) : 335-47 (at pp.336-38). Ronald S. Crane reports that a tale analogous to the Robert legend called *Imram Húi Corra* existed in Ireland fully a century before the earliest known appearance of the legend on the Continent. See his 'An Irish Analogue of the Legend of Robert the Devil,' *Romanic Review* 5 (1914) : 55-67. Also some scholars have related the legend with another group of stories, 'the Child Vowed to the Devil', but others have cast doubt on their connection. See Novelli (1963) 42-43.

(8) See his *Stammbaum* (a foldout facing p.107) in ***Sir Gowther : Eine englische Romanze aus dem XV. Jahrhundert*** (Oppeln : Franck, 1886).

(9) Novelli (1963) 45-46 ; Hopkins, ***The Sinful Knight : A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*** (Oxford : OUP, 1990) 148.

(10) *'Tydorel* and *Sir Gowther,' PMLA 20* (1905) : 152-77. *Tydorel* is included in Gaston Paris, ed. 'Lais Inedits de *Tyolet*, de *Guingamor*, de *Doon*, du *Lecheor* et de *Tydorel,' Romania* 8 (1879) : 29-72. At pp.66-72.

(11) Hopkins (1990) 148-49.

(12) Novelli (1963) 53 ; Hopkins (1990) 168-69.

(13) *'Sir Gowther* : Secular Hagiography or Hagiographical Romance or Neither?', *AUMLA* 59 (1983) : 26-47.

(14) Hopkins (1990) 146.

(15) 'The Orchard Scene in *Tydorel* and *Sir Gowther,' Romanic Review* 13 (1922) : 37-43.

(16) Hibbard, ***Mediaeval Romance in England : A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances*** (New York : OUP, 1924) 54 ; Novelli (1963) 50.

(17) Gail McMurray Gibson, ***The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*** (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 138-39.

(18) Ronald C. Finucane, ***Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England*** (London: Macmillan, 1995) 195-96.

(19) J. K. Elliott, ed. ***The Apocryphal New Testament : A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*** (Oxford : OUP, 1993) 84-85. Mikiko Ishii's books on the medieval English theatre and the Holy Family initially made me aware of the influence of the Apocryphal Gospels upon medieval literature. In particular, her ***Seibo-Maria no Nazo*** (The Mystery of the Virgin Mary) [in Japanese] (Tokyo : Hakusuisha, 1988) was helpful.

(20) Ton Brandenbarg, 'Saint Anne : A Holy Grandmother and her Children,' ***Sanctity and Motherhood : Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages***, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (New York & London: Garland, 1995) 31-65. Especially at p.36 and pp.54ff.

(21) Richard Marks, ***Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages*** (Toronto : U of Toronto P, 1993) 66.

(22) Angus McIntosh, *et al.*, ***A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English***, 4 vols. (Aberdeen : Aberdeen UP, 1986) Vol. 1, 88,115.

(23) ***Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances*** (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1976) 127-30,211-13. For a more detailed description of the manuscript context of the Advocates MS, see, among others, Phillipa Hardman, 'A Medieval Library *in Parvo,' MÆ* 47 (1978) : 262-73.

(24) See Vandelinde, *'Sir Gowther* : Saintly Knight and Knightly Saint,' *Neophilologus* 80 (1996) : 139-47 (at pp.140-41), and Joseph A. Lauritis, *et al.*, eds. ***A Critical Edition of John Lydgate's Life of Our Lady***, 3 vols., Duquesne Philological Ser. 2 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1961) 41. Guddat-Figge's table of contents of the manuscript erroneously records Books 5 to 7.

(25) The B text is taken from Thomas C. Rumble, ed., ***The Breton Lays in Middle English*** (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1965).

(26) The *Roman* is quoted from Eilert Löseth, ed., ***Robert le diable, roman d'aventures*** (Paris : Librairie de Firmin Didot, SATF, 1903 ; rpt. New York : Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968).

(27) See, for example, Hopkins (1990) 150,161.

(28) Ogle (1922) 41. For mysterious events under a tree, a chestnut tree in particular, in medieval romances, see also Novelli (1963) 160-61.

(29) The text of *Pseudo-Matthew* is contained in B. Harris Cowper, ed., *The Apocryphal Gospels and Other Documents Relating to the History of Christ*, 2nd edn. (London : Williams and Norgate, 1867).

(30) Roscoe E. Parker, ed., *The Middle English Stanzaic Versions of the Life of Saint Anne*, EETS os 174 (London : OUP, 1928) xi-xii, xvi. The quotation in the following is taken from this edition.

(31) A. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings* (Oxford : Clarendon P, 1963) 64 ; Marks (1993) 209-11.

(32) Mills (1973) 215.

(33) See, for example, Hopkins (1990) 169.

(34) *The Middle English Breton Lays*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Ser . (Kalamazoo, Michigan : Western Michigan U, 1995) 267. For the interpretation of the mother's injury, see also Donna Crawford, '"Gronyng wyth grysly wounde" : Injury in Five Middle English Breton Lays,' *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol Meale (Cambridge : D. S. Brewer, 1994) 35-52. At p.43. The injured breast may also be reminiscent of the legend of St. Agatha recounted in such works as *Legenda Aurea* and Bokenham's *Legendys*. Torturers injure her breasts as she will not renounce her faith.

(35) The English texts of the Robert legend are taken from, respectively, Henry Morley, ed., *Early Prose Romances* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1889) 167-206 'Robert the Deuyll', which is based on Williams J. Thoms, ed., *Early English Prose Romances*, 3 vols. (1858) ; W. Carew Hazlitt, ed., *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England*, 4 vols. (London : John Russell Smith , 1864-66) Vol. 1, 217-63 'The Lyfe of Roberte the Deuyll' ; Edmund Gosse, ed., *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge*, 4 vols. (Glasgow : The Hunterian Club, 1883 ; rpt. New York : Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966) Vol. 2, 1-90.

(36) The quotation is from Elliott (1993).

(37) The quotation is from Michael G. Sargent, ed. *Nicholas Love's 'Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ'*, Garland Medieval Texts 18 (New York & London : Garland, 1992).

(38) The descriptions of the hero's misdoings are slightly toned down in B with the omission of the rape of the nuns.

(39) The themes of killing the teacher and blinding the accusers may be extant in the intervening French versions between the *Roman* and the English, which I have not examined yet.

(40) Novelli (1963) 62-66.

(41) *Antichrist in the Middle Ages : A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature*. Manchester : Manchester UP, 1981. At pp.23-24, pp.63-64 and pp.74-75.

(42) 'The Penitential Pattern in *Sir Gowther*,' *Parergon* 20 (1978) : 3-10. At p.6.

(43) The identification of Gowther with St. Guthlac has been variously discussed by critics. A. McI. Trounce insists that the mention of the English saint is the poet's original contribution, given the significant correspondence of the two men's lives. See his 'The English Tail-Rhyme Romances,' iii, *MÆ* 3 (1934) : 30-50 (at p.39). Dieter Mehl, among others, dismisses the reference as a later addition, adding that this is an instance of the compilers' efforts to 'incorporate the poem in the traditional canon of Saints' legends.' See his *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London : RKP, 1968) 127. Without discussing whether or not the reference is the poet's original contribution, Vandelinde argues that the parallels between the two men are too many for their connection to be accidental. See Vandelinde (1996) 144. For the life of St. Guthlac, see Bertram Colgrave, ed., *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac : Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes* (Cambridge : CUP, 1956).

(44) The Middle English Breton lays in tail-rhyme stanzas, *Sir Gowther* included, have unusually many references to the Virgin in comparison with those in rhyming couplets. See Tajiri (1995b) 157-58.

(45) See, for example, Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London : RKP, 1954) 131-51.